

Tracking Red-necked Stints with geolocators from their breeding ground in Southern Chukotka

The Red-necked Stint is currently listed as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red List (V3.1, 2016), despite an estimated population of ~315,000, due to concerns about continuing population declines over the past decades. Although occurring regularly in large numbers at many stopover sites along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, the migration pattern and connectivity between breeding and nonbreeding sites of Red-necked Stints is less understood, potentially due to their smaller body size and the fact that no particular stopover site harbours a major proportion of the population. With recent advances in miniature tracking devices, we aimed to track the annual movement of Red-necked Stints to reveal the migration routes of the flyway's smallest *Calidris* sandpipers that depend on intertidal habitat.

Fieldwork was conducted during the boreal summer months of June to July 2016, at Meinypilgyno in Southern Chukotka, Russia. Red-necked Stints are not abundant breeders there, but a small grassy area (less than 1km²) called "Chaivaam" northwest of the village was found to be a good breeding location. At least 8 nests and 8 additional broods were found at the site by the end of the breeding season. In total, 9 geolocators were deployed, of which 5 (2F & 3M) were attached to tibia via expanded leg flag, and 4 (1F & 3M) were mounted on the birds' backs with pre-manufactured 8-shaped harnesses around their thighs. To minimize disturbance during incubation and maximize chances of retrieval, geolocators were deployed during the late incubation to brooding period. All individuals were checked after tagging to make sure they were not uncomfortable with geolocators attached.



Red-necked Stint fully fledged juveniles



Red-necked Stint with back-mounted geolocator

Each of the 9 individuals was assigned a unique ring/flag combination or an engraved light green (lime) flag. An additional 55 Red-necked Stints (10 adults and 45 juveniles) were lime flagged in a larger area around Meinypilgyno during the breeding season, with all adults and two juveniles bearing engraved flags. (5 more juveniles were flagged in August by Nikolay Yakushev during migration.) We are looking forward to hearing about resightings of any of these marked birds along the flyway. Any information should be sent to Joris Driessen at flagging@awsg.org.au, who is kindly maintaining the flag resighting database. More geolocators will be deployed, and our fingers are crossed for the return of tagged birds this coming breeding season!

We would like to thank Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Egor Loktionov, Nikolay Yakushev, and Roland Digby for their kind help and support during fieldwork. Financial support of the fieldwork comes from High Meadows Foundation.

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Tattler

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways & Australian Shorebirds 2020 Project

No. 42 January 2017

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Editorial

Declaration of a new Flyway Network Site in the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria is a significant contribution to raising awareness of important shorebird sites, and those responsible for its nomination are applauded.

Resightings of individually marked shorebirds, with colour bands or engraved leg flags, provide fascinating details about general migration routes, stopover sites and habitat preferences when they are observed and reported. Geolocators take this knowledge a step further, providing details of migration routes, breeding sites and incubation times, but only when the geolocators are retrieved from the birds and the data is downloaded and interpreted. And that depends on being able to recapture the birds with geolocators, which takes lots of patience, detailed observation of bird behaviour and targeted capture techniques. The results are rewarding – as described for a Ruddy Turnstone from South Australia. And then there are Platform Transmitter Terminals (PTTs) which transmit location details by satellite in real time, allowing targeted on-ground searches for particular birds, as described in the article on a Great Knot from Western Australia.

Hopefully these amazing technologies and the stories they generate will engage the general public in appreciating the wonders of shorebird migration and lead to better habitat protection.

Liz Crawford, Editor

Contributions are welcome and should be sent to: tattler@awsg.org.au



Black-tailed Godwits, Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant) coast, Gulf of Carpentaria. The 125th Flyway Site added to the Flyway Network – Photo by Roger Jaensch and Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Compiled and published by the Australasian Wader Studies Group

www.awsg.org.au

A Special Interest Group of BirdLife Australia

